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SW 400.01: Social Work Research

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Social Work Research
SW 400
Fall 2003

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Office Hrs: Tuesday: 9:00 - 10:45, Thursday 9:00 - 10:45, Friday 11:15 - 1:15, or by appointment
Time: Tuesday, Thursday, 11:10 - 12:30
Location: SB 336
Prerequisites: SW 360

Introduction:

To a student, the term research is often scary. It is usually associated with a form of scientific inquiry that relates to the physical sciences. However, research is part of everything we do. It is a thought process we use to solve problems, a method of inquiry that helps us build knowledge. In essence, research is a scientific process we use in every aspect of our lives.

--Bruce D. Friedman

Human beings enter this world with an unending curiosity about themselves, others, and their surrounding environment. In this sense we are all “born” researchers. At its essence research is inquisitiveness in thought and action in the pursuit of new knowledge and discovery through a creative, conceptual process of researcher engagement with the world and its mysteries.

Social work research applies the scientific method to this learning process and takes many shapes and forms. Social workers involved in diverse aspects of the social service system use principles of social research methods to evaluate the individual change process of their clients, their individual practice, and agencies, determine the effectiveness of programs and policies, and assess group, organizational and community needs. The sophisticated social worker knows that the available method choices each present strengths and weaknesses that must be understood in order to fully, effectively, and ethically utilize research results. The learning of research is a process of becoming familiar with the relative advantages and disadvantages of the various choices and learning to choose between them. This learning allows the social worker not only to understand the literature that they encounter in professional practice but to also make effective contributions to the practice field through helpful participation in conducting research.

Course Description: This course is designed to develop each student’s ability to understand the results of empirical research presented in professional journals including the reading of statistics. In addition to developing the ability to critically analyze research, students will develop an ability to design and conduct basic research studies within the ethical constraints of human research while supporting the underlying ethics, values (human diversity, social justice, self-determination and equality) and principles of the social work profession. In this process students will become familiar with two predominant social science research paradigms; logical positivist and interpretative (relativist) approaches, and explore possibilities for blending methodologies that are qualitative and quantitative in nature to best fit differing research needs. Examples of research drawn from the field of social work will be used to illustrate selected

research methodologies. Social research designs covered in this course include case study, content analysis, single subject/system, ethnographic, experimental, quasi-experimental, survey, and program evaluation methods. The course will introduce students to associated statistical methods that are applicable to the aforementioned methods. Statistics focus will be primarily on reading/interpreting results and understanding appropriate uses of a statistic. Students will also begin to develop their research skills through the experiential component of this course which will consist of developing in collaboration with their practicum agency a limited qualitative and quantitative study to answer a research question of interest. The course emphasizes blending the practitioner/researcher role and therefore making research an integral component of ethically informed effective social work practice.

Course Objectives:

1. Articulate the difference between qualitative and quantitative research methods, their philosophical bases, and their strengths and limitations.
2. Discuss how unquestioned assumptions about human diversity, which includes issues concerning gender, ethnicity, age and sexual orientation, can cause biases in question formulation, research design, measurement, sampling, analysis, and results.
3. Understand the ethical considerations and processes for protecting Human Subjects.
4. Describe basic data gathering techniques and the implications of different levels of measurement for social work research.
5. Identify and discuss a variety of methodological approaches to research such as case studies, experimental, participatory, needs assessments and so on.
6. Demonstrate understanding of the various threats to validity and associated reliability questions as applied to research articles and unpublished agency studies that incorporate a range of research methods.
7. Read, interpret, and critique research journal articles based on their consideration of the underlying values, ethics, and principles of social work profession.
8. Develop a working familiarity with library resources necessary to conduct a literature review based on your practicum placement field of study.
9. Demonstrate competency in the computation and interpretation of basic descriptive statistics.
10. Demonstrate competency in the interpretation of basic inferential statistics and their associated research.
11. Demonstrate the use of a computer statistics package to calculate basic statistics.
12. Identify basic steps of the generalist practice model and their connections to scientific inquiry.

13. Discuss the contextual nature of research and its ethical, political, and sociocultural implications.
14. Describe how research findings can contribute to social work's knowledge base and the development of programs and services that promote social justice in our society.

Required Text: Research Methods for Social Work, (2001) Rubin & Babbie.

1. Assignments:

Integrating Practice/Research Exercises

Students will have several opportunities to engage in limited direct research, research planning, and research evaluation/critiquing projects. These efforts are designed to assist the student in applying what they are learning through the text, lectures, and class discussion to real research.

Throughout the course in groups and individually, students will engage in evaluation of research articles. Three of these evaluations will be completed for a grade. The final exam will also be one of these evaluations for a total of four critiques.

In addition to the evaluation of research literature, each student will complete three limited research design and implementation projects. Beginning with a simple design (known in this class as the Mini Project), students will advance through the design and completion of a single subject research project and finish with the completion of a qualitative/quantitative research investigation and report. The single subject and qualitative/quantitative research projects will be completed in consultation with the instructor. By the end of the course the student will be comfortable in examining, critiquing, and designing a number of different types of research projects that will have direct application in the practice arena.

Detailed outlines will be provided to students regarding the above assignments.

ALL PAPERS SUBMITTED FOR THIS CLASS ARE REQUIRED TO BE IN APA FORMAT.

2. Quizzes/Final Examination:

There will be 4 quizzes/examinations. Students will be provided a study guide in advance. Examinations/quizzes will consist of matching, true and false, multiple choice and essay questions. Information covered will address textbook material, class room discussion/lecture information, and handouts. The final examination will entail an evaluation of a quantitative/qualitative research article. Guidelines will be presented prior to the exam and will also be used with other research article evaluation exercises.

3. Incomplete Policy.

No incomplete grade, "I", will be allowed except in exceptional cases in accordance with university policies regarding Incomplete (I) Grades. Students are expected to familiarize themselves with this policy.

4. Timeliness.

Papers are expected to be turned in on the date specified. Quizzes are expected to be taken during the time provided. Points will be deducted for late papers and quizzes.

5. Participation and Attendance

The class will be participating in several hands-on exercises to help facilitate learning of key concepts, including group projects focused on analyzing research articles. Attendance is important for maximum student benefit. The grade will be based upon students attendance and readiness to participate (including: covering readings in advance of class and having materials in hand for group projects as assigned). Note: missing more than 3 classes will result in the student losing one grade level in the class.

6. Due Dates

| | |
|-----------------------------------|---------|
| Mini Project | Week 3 |
| Article Critique | Week 4 |
| Quiz 1. | Week 5 |
| Quiz 2. | Week 8 |
| Single Subject | Week 10 |
| Quiz 3. | Week 11 |
| Article Critique | Week 13 |
| Quiz 4. | Week 14 |
| Article Critique | Week 15 |
| Qualitative/Quantitative Research | Week 16 |
| Final Exam. | Week 16 |

7. Determination of Course Grade *(points/percentage)*

| | |
|---|--------------------|
| Mini Project | 50 (5%) |
| Single Subject Design Project | 100 (10%) |
| Qualitative/Quantitative Research Project | 200 (20%) |
| Research Article Analysis (3@50 points) | 150 (15%) |
| Quizzes (4@100 points each) | 400 (40%) |
| Final Examination (evaluation of article) | <u>100 (10%)</u> |
| Total Points: | 1000 (100%) |

| <u>Points Earned</u> | <u>Final Grade</u> |
|----------------------|--------------------|
| 1000-900 | A |
| 899-800 | B |
| 799-700 | C |
| 699-600 | D |
| < 600 | F |

SCHEDULE

Week One: September 2, 4

Empirically based practice: the research foundation.

Read: Preface/Chapter 1, 2
 Topics: Introduction to class/assignments, the importance of research to humane, ethical social services. The nature of reality/knowning and the scientific method. Introduction to qualitative and quantitative approaches.

Week Two: September 9, 11

Research, theory, and practice; the ethics of rational inquiry.

Read: Chapters 3, 4
 Topics: The link between theory, research and practice. Research purposes. Introduction to ethical considerations. Protection of Human Subjects. Cultural &/or gender bias- social and political implications. Benefits vs. costs of research.

Week Three: September 16, 18

MINI PROJECT - DUE (18th)

Read: Chapters 5, 6
 Topics: Research purposes and process. Units of analysis. Measuring anything that exists. Operational considerations; causal relationships, independent/dependent variables Qualitative and Quantitative Measures.

Week Four: September 23, 25

ARTICLE CRITIQUE #ONE - DUE (25th)

Read: Chapter 7, Handout (Threats to Internal and External Validity)
 Topics: Measurement. Variation. Levels of Measurement. Frequency Distributions. Introduction to reliability, validity and threats to validity.

Week Five: September 30, October 2 September 30:

QUIZ: WEEKS 1, 2, 3, 4.

Read: Weinbach & Grinnell, (2001). chapter 3.
 Topics: Descriptive Statistics. Working with measures of central tendency, variability, and percentages. Standard deviation.

Week Six:
October 7, 9

Read: Chapter 11
Topics: Descriptive statistics continued, uses of computers in research. Statistical vs. practical significance. Parametric and Non-parametric defined
Introduction to single case designs in social work.

Week Seven:
October 14, 16

Read: Chapter 11
Topics: Use of single case designs in social work continued: designs, validity. Standard normal distribution/ z scores, skew-ness. The chi-square statistic. Introduction to research instruments.

Week Eight:
October 21, 23
October 21:

QUIZ: WEEKS 5, 6.7.

Read: Chapter 8
Topics: Construction of research instruments. Developing questions and questionnaires. The Mann-Whitney U statistical test.

Week Nine:
October 28, 30

Read: Chapter 9
Topics: Probability and sampling designs. The Wilcoxon Matched-Pairs statistical test.

Week Ten:
November 4, 6,

SINGLE SUBJECT PROJECT DUE (4th)

Read: Chapter 10, 17
Topics: Validity and the relationship to experimental and quasi-experimental designs. Cause. Introduction to types of inferential statistical tests. Reading inferential statistics, basic concepts, t-tests, analysis of variance.

Week Eleven:
November 11 - Holliday
November 13:

QUIZ: WEEKS 8, 9, 10.

Read: Chapter 12, 18
 Topics: Methods of survey research - The questionnaire: personal face to face interviewing, mail and telephone interviewing. Reading inferential statistics; regression analysis, logistic regression.

Week Twelve:
November 18, 20

Read: Chapter 13
 Topics: Qualitative research terminology, methods, and issues of establishing validity.

Week Thirteen:
November 25:

ARTICLE CRITIQUE #TWO - DUE (25th)
 Classroom Exercise

THANKSGIVING BREAK: November 27 - 30

Week Fourteen:
December 2, 4
December 2:

QUIZ: WEEKS 11, 12, 13.

Read: Chapter 14
 Topics: Unobtrusive research methods and secondary analysis.

Week Fifteen:
December 9, 11

ARTICLE CRITIQUE #THREE - DUE (9th)

Read: Chapter 19
 Topics: Program evaluation: types and utilization focused methods.

Week Sixteen:
December 15 - 19
Finals Week:

QUALITATIVE/QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH PROJECT DUE (15th)

FINAL EXAM (December _____)

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